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Using Dual-Language Books to Preserve Language & Culture in Alaska Native Communities

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Abstract

“Children learn their language on their mother’s lap.” This conventional wisdom from a Cup’ik Elder describes the approach used by many Alaska Native peoples to promote native language acquisition. Presumably, the children learn by listening to stories and tales from a trusted parent or caregiver. However, what happens when the caregiver does not speak the native language? This chapter describes an effort to address this issue while also promoting better educational outcomes by providing access to diverse dual-language books in Alaska Native languages through the use of a digital children’s library. Potential benefits from these efforts include an increase in resources for schools, a revitalization of Indigenous languages, and an increase in access, with hopes that future work will show evidence that using these dual-language books encourage greater parent support and involvement in education, support second language acquisition, and promote a strong sense of identity. Implications and future efforts follow.

Introduction

In villages across Alaska, communities struggle to figure out how to educate their children, emphasizing the traditional ways of knowing, while the children study in non-Indigenous schools. While elders have recognized the inevitable influence of Western contact and the importance of preparing students to have a strong sense of identity rooted in a bilingual, bicultural education system, they face multiple challenges. Where are they going to find materials in a language known by so few? Who will advocate for them, a people whose ways of knowing are recognized and valued by even fewer? After decades of inequities and Indigenous language suppression policies, how do they fill the resulting language gap that exists between young parents who do not know their native heritage language and -- as a result of immersion schools -- their now bilingual-speaking children?

Cup’ik Elder Cecilia Pingayak-Andrews has addressed these questions and concerns; when asked what was needed to retain the language and culture, she responded, “Children learn our language on their mother’s lap. But how are we going to keep the language alive if the parents themselves do not speak it?” (Ayuluk et al., 2015,

p. 66). Presumably, they learn by listening to stories and tales, both in oral and written form, from a trusted parent or caregiver. However, what happens when that caregiver does not speak the language? In communities where generations of Indigenous peoples have fallen victim to the colonization of western influences and systematic suppression of culture and language through an assimilation model, alternatives must be found, particularly those that help meet the linguistically unique educational needs of Native students while also preserving, revitalizing, and using these students' Native languages (Wilson, 2014). This chapter describes one such effort in which I, a non-native teacher educator, university researcher, and advocate, initiated a project to help provide access to a digital library of diverse books that were translated into Alaska Native languages, in hopes it will help the next generation learn their native languages and increase educational outcomes. I believe that access to dual-language children's books is an essential part of bridging the language gap and, with the resurgence of language immersion schools, could be at the center of language revitalization efforts across Alaska.

Why This Matters

"Our language is everything. It's the air we breathe. It's the blood that flows through our veins" (Professor Lance X'unei Twitchell, as reported in Chappell, 2014, para. 10).

Language extinction is a reality for many communities around the world. According to Jim Cummins (2005), "Currently, there is massive loss of national language resources because young children are given few opportunities to use and become literate in their heritage languages" (p. 590). He goes on to state that we "...need to focus attention on changing the patterns of interaction and the message children receive about the value and status of their heritage languages" (p. 590). Providing access to programs and opportunities to support these children and communities, particularly those that are Alaska Native, must be done quickly, for a) as peoples, they are at risk, and b) their languages are at risk for becoming extinct. While these two issues may very well be intertwined, for the purposes of this chapter, they will be addressed separately.

A People at Risk, A People Of Promise

Despite daily displays of fortitude and perseverance in an unequal world, students from minority backgrounds, especially those from linguistically diverse communities, have lower rates of success in schools; Alaskan Native peoples especially appear to be struggling. On average, Alaska Native peoples score more than two grade levels below their white and Asian-American peers in both reading and math (National Caucus of Native American State Legislators, 2008), with only 7% of Alaska Native fourth-graders considered proficient in reading compared to 41% of white Alaskans on the NAEP (Brown, 2015); they are 50% more likely to be placed in special education programs for general learning disabilities (National Center for Culturally Responsive

Teaching, 2006); they have the lowest levels of high school graduation, with only 57% graduating compared to 78% of white Alaskans (Brown, 2015); are more likely to be expelled at higher rates (Glavinic, 2010); and are less likely to pursue higher education (NCNASL, 2008). Outside of school they are also at high risk for suicide, with Alaska Native men between the ages of 15-24 having the highest rate of suicide in the country, with an average of 155.3 suicides per 100,000 people between 2000 and 2009 (State Suicide Prevention Council, 2007) and the suicide rate for Alaska Native peoples being more than twice that of non-Natives (Thiessen, 2012). And according to the Center for Disease Control (2015), in conjunction with Native Americans, Alaska Native peoples were among those with the highest prevalence of binge drinking, smoking prevalence, pre-term birth rate, drug-induced death rates, infant mortality, motor vehicle-related death rates, age-standardized percentage of adults living in poverty, and unemployment. While it is appropriate to question the data collection methods, the intentions of the researchers, and the message these types of statistics send through the mere mention of numbers, they do serve to illustrate the point that this group of peoples needs attention and support.

However, these are peoples of promise, with strong histories of resilience, strength, and determination. Alaska Native peoples have survived while living in some of the harshest conditions in the world, using the earth's resources in creative and pragmatic ways. They have shown an outstanding ability to pass down local knowledge and skills, tools, crafts, and artwork that are highly complex, prized, and practical despite the environmental and economic realities and influence of colonialism that often hinder the transmission of Indigenous knowledge. And Alaska Native peoples as a whole continue to thrive amongst strong family networks that provide for children and the elderly (Goodluck & Willetto, 2009), drawing upon traditional knowledge systems that elders pass on to future generations. Despite these extraordinary strengths, they are peoples that desperately need support to flourish.

Languages at Risk

The Alaska Federation of Natives (2007) asserts that "Native language intrinsic to community wellness, cultural survival and subsistence—is vital to the process of teaching and learning" (p. 10). This is because of the explicit link between the preservation of language and the preservation of culture. "The survival and revival of Indigenous languages is imperative for the protection, transmission, maintenance, and preservation of Indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and wisdom" (Coolongatta Statement on Indigenous Rights in Education as cited in Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2010, p. 255). Despite this recognition that Alaska Native languages "are the backbone of our culture," many are almost extinct (Olson, 2012, para. 2). While over a quarter of all Alaska Native children live in homes where their native language is spoken more frequently than English (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008), only 22% of Alaska Native peoples can speak their language (Olson, 2012). According to Gary Holton, "Simply based on the number of speakers and their ages, it may be impossible for the most

endangered Alaskan languages to keep from going the way of the Eyak [a language technically extinct]" (Dunham, 2011, para. 21). However, as Della Warrior has surmised,

If the little ones can learn the language, then the language will have a chance of surviving. Along with the language, of course, is the culture. Learning their language will help develop the student's pride in their own identity as a tribal person (Rodriguez & Warrior, 2013, para. 6).

Thus the urgency to make sure current generations learn and sustain these languages needs to be even greater than in the past.

Need for Access

While the risks to Alaska Native peoples and their languages are apparent, so is the need for access to materials in the students' native languages, both in school and within the home. A lack of resources can result in several problems. First, it can prevent parents for whom English is a second language from reading to their children, starting at a young age. Given that it has been reported that one of the best indicators of children's success in school is related to how much they have been read to (Kern & Friedman, 2008), this could lead to academic hardships later on. Second, a lack of resources does not provide encouragement or opportunities for students themselves to read material in their native language. This is important, given that the number of books in the child's home and the frequency with which the child reads for fun is also related to higher test scores, as reported by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Finally, when students do not see a plethora of materials in their own language, one of the unintended consequences is that students do not see that others value the language, a message that is unfortunately often received throughout their schooling (Cummins, 2005). We know that preserving and sustaining Alaska Native languages is of value, for language is rooted in and reflects the culture from which it emerged (Emmitt & Pollock, 1997); thus, making sure materials are available in those languages is of utmost important for both literacy development and preservation of culture.

Why Books?

"Our goal is to help young children (and other novice language speakers) not only fall in love with books, but through those books celebrate their language and culture" (Clyde & Condon, 2011, p. 12).

When considering what materials would be of value to help respond to the needs of Alaska Native peoples, one answer is books. Books have played an important role in education throughout history and are often considered to be the most important and lasting tool in education. With the invention of the printing press and subsequent production of manuscripts and books, communities were finally able to ensure local knowledge and stories would be preserved long after the story tellers, elders, and authors passed on, thus becoming a permanent means of preserving language and

culture. Books have also become a means to ensuring later educational success. Researchers have documented that homes with one hundred books that are used, enjoyed, and discussed are homes where children experience success in school and beyond; perhaps even more astounding, research has indicated having a 500-book library can boost a child's education by 3.2 years, an effect that surpasses the effects of parental education levels (Evans, Kelly, Sikora, & Treiman, 2010).

This connection to later academic success comes from the numerous skills children obtain from using and interacting with books. In addition to transmitting important literature and themes from one generation to the next, books allow children to respond to literature and develop emotional intelligence and creativity while nurturing growth and the development of the child's personality and social skills (Norton & Norton, 2010). When portrayed accurately, books can give students an appreciation about their own cultural heritage as well as others, as multicultural literature "cultivates an educated awareness to other cultural customs and values, promotes communication with people from other countries, and enhances experiences involving theirs and others' cultures" (Lowery and Sabis-Burns, 2007, p. 50). This is especially true of Indigenous dual-language books, which expand awareness of cultural and language diversity among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers. As such, "Indigenous bilingual books offer an opportunity to create awareness of and help revitalize Indigenous languages" (Hadaway & Young, 2014, p. 363).

This notion was embraced by the Intercultural Development Research Association's (IDRA) Semillitas – Seedlings for Learning Project, a supplemental curriculum and professional development program designed to respond to the need for educational equity with culturally and linguistically relevant materials and create home-school partnerships in Texas and Oklahoma. As part of the project, bilingual books were created to teach key learning concepts for several Native American tribes. Della Warrior captured their expected impact:

The books, once completed, will be a really valuable learning tool for the young children of each tribe and will help preserve and foster language continuation. It is very exciting! It is important to remember that it has been only recently that some tribes have begun developing written languages. Some are struggling to develop orthographies and dictionaries. So the work we are doing is very important in helping them retrieve, revive and retain their respective languages (Rodriguez & Warrior, 2013, p. 2).

With such enthusiasm and research, it is difficult to argue with the impact children's books, particularly those available in national heritage languages, can make for both children and entire language communities.

Theoretical Frameworks

Keeping in mind the needs of Alaska Native peoples, including better academic

outcomes, the preservation of language and culture, and increased access to resources, this chapter reflects primarily the effort of one non-Native community-engaged university teacher educator and researcher, who with the support of colleagues, sought out an opportunity to work with Alaska Native community members (including Indigenous teachers, para-professionals, students, Elders, and parents) to help them retain their language and culture through the creation of a dual-language digital library of children's books. I adopted an anticolonial approach and a perspective that envisions not dying languages, but the possibility of languages that will help transmit the knowledge of place and the cultural traditions for parents, children, and future generations. In moving forward with the design of the project, I reflected on the components of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy, as I debated how to acknowledge western influences but also draw on the strengths of the community to promote identity and achievement; additionally, in thinking about the consequences specifically related to language, I referred to Cummins' work on Empowerment Theory (1986).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy comes from a place that first acknowledges that the current educational system was created and continues to operate under western, Eurocentric ideologies and practices. This can cause students from minority communities to feel alienated and unengaged. As framed by Hanley and Noblit (2009), culturally responsive pedagogy also embraces the idea that other cultures can and should be incorporated in the practices of teaching and learning to engage student interest, develop ownership of learning, and inspire achievement while also respecting and strengthening the cultures students bring to school. Villegas and Lucas (2002) recommend culturally responsive educators embrace the following characteristics and actions to promote identity, resilience, and achievement:

- Develop a socio-cultural consciousness and think about how institutional structures impact individual experiences.
- Have high expectations and affirming views of students of all backgrounds.
- See themselves as change agents who can make a difference.
- Adopt a constructivist approach and acknowledge that learners construct their own knowledge.
- Learn more about their students.
- Design and build instruction based off students' prior knowledge and experiences to help move them forward.

The theories behind culturally responsive pedagogy had a large influence on the approach to the project. First, it impacted my starting place; I had to acknowledge the western influence on my own notions of schooling, education, and language. Second, it encouraged me to think of myself as a change agent, as an individual who could make a difference. Finally, culturally responsive pedagogy reminded me to use the

community's knowledge and experiences to move the project forward.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The work was also informed and framed through the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) and her understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings maintains that to practice culturally relevant pedagogy, one must recognize that teaching takes place outside the classroom as well as within, that students are "school dependent," that teachers must understand that curriculum is not ideologically neutral, and that instruction should be designed to attend to the context while also preparing students for traditional societal demands. Keeping these principles in mind, the project as a whole has been developed to provide dual-language digital books that can be accessed for free through computers, tablets, and other mobile devices as long as there is Internet access. While the books translated and narrated through the project reinforce, preserve, and celebrate native languages by including audio files for readers to listen to, which reinforces the value of oral language, the original format of Alaska Native languages, they also privilege English, the language of schooling, by including the words both through written form and audio files. The content of the books contain somewhat universal notions of what is important for children to learn, like the days of the week, shapes, animal names, and other practices or things that are routinely done or seen; additionally, the pictures do include a wealth of images that represent the incredible diversity of our world. That said, I acknowledge that I have much work to do towards enacting a truly culturally relevant pedagogy, which, in an ideal setting, would include books that contain stories generated by the local community with local pictures and would contain the native language in written form while emphasizing specific local values.

Cummin's Empowerment Theory

Finally, the project was influenced by Cummin's work that addresses issues related to language status and power; he found that success for children from minority linguistic communities was more likely in contexts where school-community partnerships were formed with families (Sneddon, 2008). Schools that were successful in helping to empower their students incorporated minority students' language and culture into the school program, encouraged community participation and treated it as integral to the larger program, encouraged students to use language to generate knowledge, and used professionals involved in assessment to advocate for the students (Cummins, 1986). Keeping this in mind, this project tried to incorporate the three aforementioned principles in that it was hinged on creating resources that could be used both in school and at home, with people who did and did not speak Indigenous languages; the resources were collaboratively created with well-respected community members helping with the translations and narrations of the books; and the resources were not just developed for entertainment, but to facilitate learning key concepts.

The Project

Getting Started

How did this project creating dual-language books in various Alaska Native languages start? As necessitated in culturally relevant pedagogy, it started with awareness, induced by a student from rural Alaska who identified as Alaska Native. After prompting my students to list ten important literacy events in their lives during class, this student shared a moment from her childhood when she first recognized that what she called "*saltuq*" was called "*Crisco*" or "*shortening*" by her white friends. It was a critical moment where she recognized that non-Natives did not understand her language, Iñupiaq. It was a moment when she second-guessed its value and perhaps the first indication of a time when she would no longer respond to her mother in Iñupiaq but in English. For me, it became a moment when I second-guessed whether or not I was doing my part to recognize her, her culture, and her first language.

My awareness of the need to consider my part in preserving and promoting Alaska Native languages, another aspect of culturally relevant pedagogy, grew with an invitation to attend an educational symposium in Nome dedicated to looking at educational issues for Inuit peoples and students. At the symposium, I was an observer, hearing calls for language revitalization and preservation and the need to increase access to materials in home languages. As one teen reflected on how she was trying to help teach her language to others at the local high school but had few resources or books at her disposal, I found myself reflecting on how I could help. While I was aware of an organization (Unite for Literacy) that housed a digital library with books translated into a multitude of languages, I was unsure whether this was the route to go and was thus paralyzed, stuck in a cycle of doing nothing.

My awareness and my sense of agency, however, exploded with a trip to rural Alaska. While originally out there to teach a one-week intensive class to Alaska Native paraprofessionals working on obtaining their teacher's certificates, I found myself spending both days and nights with these students/paraprofessionals who vocalized their desire to create more resources for their children in their native language. When I mentioned using Unite for Literacy as an option, they sprang into action. The paraprofessionals went through the digital library and chose books they thought would be good for their students and easy to translate. Then, we met after class to translate and narrate the books into Cup'ik. While the books were not their original creations, as they were not authoring them but translating them, they recognized that the books would help their children learn their Native language, reinforce key concepts (like colors, animal names, and the weather) and be accessible to everyone. That, in and of itself, was considered worthwhile. The trip ended with thirteen books translated in Cup'ik – and a recognition that this might have tangible effects for both early literacy development and the preservation of languages.

Moving Forward

Naqingnaqaqlutin erneq tamalkuan. Make time to read everyday.

(From *Everybody Reads* by Holly Hartman on www.uniteforliteracy.com)

After returning from rural Alaska, I started gathering momentum to increase the collection of books in Alaska Native languages on the Unite for Literacy website—a site that contains hundreds of original, simple children's books created specifically to promote early literacy and provides an abundance of books to all children, regardless of their native language or socio-economic level. Unite for Literacy supplied the books, the resources, the server, and the support we needed; I had the translators, the narrators, and the drive to make it happen. With a few small grants, I was able to continue to work with the Cup'ik paraprofessionals, paying them to use their talents to translate the books. Staying within the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy, I allowed them to decide which books on the site would be most relevant to their culture and that would meet the needs of their students. With but a microphone, a computer, a list of directions, and their own talents, two of the paraprofessionals began translating and narrating books and the project was off and running!

At the same time, I expanded the project to other Alaska Native languages. Next on my list was Iñupiaq, the language of the student who first made me aware of the language and culture around me. Serendipitously, her mother and a colleague, who had mentioned the lack of materials at the symposium I attended in Nome, volunteered to help translate. Charged with the task of choosing, translating, and narrating 25 books, they were on their way as well, while I simply provided the funds, guidance, and communications with Unite for Literacy.

As of September 2016, there are now 25 Iñupiaq books and 50 Cup'ik books translated and narrated for families, children, and teachers to enjoy on Unite for

Literacy, with plans in motion to create more books in Iñupiaq, as well as in Tlingit. While the project relies on active participation from the community, one of the aspects reflected in Cummin's work, there really are no other limits. While short on limits, the possibilities are plentiful, including opportunities to spread the word about the resource, increase the breadth and depth of the library itself, to get the books into paper form to help with issues of access (for those without Internet), and to start observing how teachers, families, and children use them. The room for growth is incredible!

Discussion

Emerging Benefits

At present time, anecdotally, several benefits have emerged from the project. These benefits include an increase in resources for local language immersion schools and cultural consultants and teachers, an expansion of the local languages, and a clear example of how digital books can be used to increase equity in minority language communities.

Support of language-immersion schools. A bi-product of having dual-language books is that language immersion schools, long championed as a way to promote identity and empowerment for minority language students, can have the resources they need to operate (Kawakamai & Dudoit, 2000). "Resources, both material and human, must be considered, along with community interest. In the case of less commonly taught languages, these issues may define what is possible" (Klee, Lynch, & Tarone, 1998, p.7). With so many Alaska Native languages having so few human resources, local cultural consultants in preschools and elementary schools have reported, through interviews and during observations, that the books provide a much-needed resource they can use to increase receptive language skills and teach fundamental skills and concepts (like colors, the days of the week, shapes, etc.). Teachers have been observed using the books to introduce certain topics of inquiry, like using *What's in the Ocean?* to kick off a unit on ocean animals. They have also been used to make connections to kids' home languages. For example, one teacher switched between English, Iñupiaq, and Vietnamese so that she could reinforce multiple kids' home languages; she found it particularly meaningful when one child exclaimed, "It sounds like my *apa!*" ("*Apa*" is grandfather in Siberian Yup'ik). Another teacher was able to introduce the word "cold" in Iñupiaq using the book *Is it Cold Outside?* Using the book and hand motions, the children practiced the word over and over again. Finally, several teachers were observed using the books to reinforce early literacy concepts, emphasizing print concepts and asking comprehension questions to check for understanding. Observing practices like these provide evidence that the books are indeed, being used as intended.

Expansion of language. Another benefit from this project has been the language expansion that has occurred within the two Alaska Native languages that have been targeted so far through this project. In today's society, there are a number of items that require names and labels that would never have been needed back when the languages

were created, simply because they were not relevant or did not exist. For example, what is the translation for computer? Or cowboy? Or watermelon? These are not items with traditional roots in Alaska or that would have translations in Alaska Native languages. Thus, our translators started creating their own Cup'ik and Iñupiaq words. For example, in the book, *Bedtime*, the child says, "I find my snuggly", which was translated into Cup'ik as, "*Wii nallkaqaa snuggly-qaa.*" In the book *Animals I Know*, the word "*Israapalik*" was created in Iñupiaq for "Raccoon." While this process may be considered controversial, the expansion of a language to include more modern terms and ideas inevitably makes it more usable, relatable, and connected to the younger generations.

Increasing access. Finally, the use of a free, digital library that contains books for young children to listen to and read in a multitude of different languages is helping to lessen the equity issue of Alaska Native children not having books in their Indigenous languages. We know that the realities of the economics and logistics of the book publishing industry preclude equitable access to literacy and that this is especially true for those languages that are endangered, exacerbating the equity issue many of the native groups already face in so many other areas of life. However, with nothing needed but a mobile device and an Internet connection, entire communities are finding themselves with access to an abundance of books, breaking a barrier that has existed for decades. Thus, we see this project sending the message that Alaska Native languages are important and legitimate and helping set up students for success academically in multiple ways, for, as shared by former U.S. Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education Susan B. Neuman:

Access to books is the single biggest barrier to literacy development in the United States and beyond. If we can solve the problem of access, we will be well on the road to realizing educational parity – a goal which has eluded this country for generations.

Potential Benefits

While the benefits observed so far have been promising, the hope is that Alaska Native students might receive many of the same benefits identified within the literature on other efforts related to bilingual literacy and the use of dual-language books, including transfer of skills, increasing parent support, and increasing positive self-identity.

Transfer of skills. Research has indicated that students' success in their national heritage language leads to greater success in second language acquisition. Many studies have shown that numerous skills in reading transfer from one language to another (Bialystok, 1991; Cummins, 1989c, 1991, 1996b, 2002; 1994; Hudelson, 1994; Lessow-Hurely, 2005; Lindholm & Leary, 2001; as reported in Ovando & Combs, 2012). These skills include general strategies, habits and attitudes, knowledge of text structure, rhetorical devices, sensorimotor skills, visual-perceptual training, and cognitive function. There is also considerable evidence that readers are able to apply the visual,

linguistic, and cognitive strategies they used in their first language to English (2012). Additionally, there is also some evidence that vocabulary and complex structures of language are more readily encountered in books than in social conversation (Cummins, 2000) and that students can comprehend much more through listening and reading (Ovando and Combs, 2012). Both of these benefits can be facilitated through the use of dual-language books.

Increasing parent support. There is evidence that using dual-language books encourage greater parent support and involvement in education (Dutcher, 2004, Perez, 2003, Ernst-Slavit, 1997, Medina, 2010, Rodriguez-Valles, 2011, Sneddon, 2008), which is important given that studies have demonstrated that parent involvement in school is significantly associated with lower rates of high school dropout, increased on-time high school completion, and highest grade completed (Barnard, 2004). Sneddon's (2008) study looked at the effects of a school sending home dual-language books in a community in England and found that because of the teacher's encouragement to learn the home language, a close relationship was formed between the school and the parents. In one case, this resulted in two Albanian mothers improving their own English skills and then volunteering in the school. In the case of Rodriguez-Valls' (2014) work with an after-school reading cooperative in California, in which families were given bilingual books and instructions in dialogic reading, he found that the parents were more likely to engage in biliterate practices and see themselves as active participants in the learning process. As one teacher involved in the study reflected:

Using bilingual books in the reading cooperatives not only helped the student who is not a fluent English reader but also the parent who does not speak the language. By having these types of books the parent was able to read to his or her child in the language that she/he feels at ease. Parents now know that though they might not speak English, they can help their children learn this language (Rodriguez-Valls, 2014, p. 30).

Cummins (2000) also found that academic success for children from minority linguistic communities was more likely to occur in contexts where the school built partnerships with families and incorporated the children's language and culture into its curriculum. Thus, the case by elder Cecilia Pingayak-Andrews that parents are involved is reaffirmed within western research on the benefits of involving families.

Culturally responsive pedagogy and positive sense of identity. Research indicates that both culturally responsive pedagogy and positive racial identity promote academic achievement and resilience (Hanley & Noblit, 2009). Additionally, it has been documented that minority students who are empowered by their school experiences through the use of dual-language books, may gain a stronger sense of identity. For example, Sneddon (2008) found in his collective case study, which looked at bilingual children of primary school age learning their home language using dual-language books provided by their school, that using dual-language books had a positive impact on

children's confidence, their personal identity as bilingual, their achievement in English literacy, and their parents' involvement in their schools. Hudleston (1987) also found that by encouraging native languages, children viewed themselves as competent readers and writers (not being limited by developing language skills); this increase in confidence in their native language literacy then helped children move into English reading and writing more proficiently.

Final Thoughts

"Allowing children access to their native language is one way of enabling those who have been silenced to speak." (Hudleston, 1987, p.840).

By having access to dual-language books, communities across rural Alaska are finding themselves with tangible resources to help encourage early literacy development and to preserve their native languages; they are receiving and spreading the message that their language and culture matter; and they are seizing opportunities for elders and children, speakers and non-speakers, to read together. For some, this may be the first time they have had access to an abundance of books; for many, the first time they have had books in their native language. The symbolism in this – in having materials to read and listen to in languages other than English – is powerful, and it is my hope that it signals an appreciation for language, for peoples, and for cultures.

When discussing culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (2006) made the statement that as teacher educators, "It is a long-term commitment, not just to the students but also to society" (p.40), and I take that seriously. This project, a simple one that seeks to make dual-language books available in Alaska Native languages, does seek to have an impact -- not just on the students' literacy development but also on the communities. In the end, hopefully, communities will see their native languages thrive and transform from being at risk to being of promise.

This is not to say that this project and work are without limitations. There are many, including a lack of representation of other Alaska Native languages within the digital library; the absence of written text in the native languages in the books; and no alternatives for those without access to a mobile device, computer, or tablet. The pictures are not all authentic and the stories are not necessarily reflective of each culture reading them. Without volunteers to translate, it is difficult to scale. And at present time, research has not been conducted to see if these dual-language books yield the same types of benefits as other studies have.

Despite these limitations, there is an enormous amount of possibility in the creation of dual language books. And if those possibilities are reached, perhaps this book's story will come true:

Tamalkurmeng naqituut. Aanat naaqituut. Aatat naaqituut. Arnat naaqituut. Angutet naaqituut. Piipit naaqituut. Angturiqertellriit naaqituut. Naaqituukuk. Naaqituuten. Tamalkumta naaqituukut!

(From *Everyone Reads* by Holly Hartman. Translation: Everyone reads. Mothers read. Fathers read. Girls read. Boys read. Babies read. Grownups read. We read. You read. Everyone reads!)

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